

AMENDMENTS TO THE CLAIMS

This listing of claims replaces all prior versions, and listings, of claims in the application.

1-15. (cancelled)

16. (currently amended) A process ~~of treating milk to improve~~ promote coagulation of ~~the~~ milk during its transformation into dairy products comprising ~~adding to the milk during its storage.~~ before coagulation treatment, a *Lactobacillus plantarum* strain of lactic bacteria:

- adding a starter culture to the milk;
- coagulating the milk by adding a coagulant to yield a coagulum;
- cutting the coagulum;
- separating the curd from the whey;

wherein

~~before adding the starter culture to the milk at least one strain of lactic bacteria selected from the group consisting of: *L. plantarum* LMG-P-21385, *L. lactis* subsp. *lactis* LMG-P-21387, *L. lactis* subsp. *lactis* LMG-P-21388 and *L. plantarum* LMG-P-21389 is added to the milk.~~

17. (currently amended) Process as claimed in claim 16, characterized in that said ~~at least one~~ strain is added to the milk in the form of liquid culture.

18. (currently amended) Process as claimed in claim 16, characterized in that said ~~at least one~~ strain is added to the milk in anhydrous form.

19. (currently amended) Process as claimed in claim 16, characterized in that said ~~at least one~~ strain is added to the milk in quantities ranging from 0.1 to 1% of liquid culture with respect to the milk (volume/volume).

20. (currently amended) Process as claimed in claim 19, characterized in that said ~~at least one~~ strain is added to the milk in quantities ranging from 0.3 to 0.5% of liquid culture in respect of the milk (volume/volume).

21. (currently amended) Process as claimed in claim 16, characterized in that said ~~at least one~~ strain is added to the milk in quantities ranging from 10^{11} to 10^{12} CFU/100 litres of milk.

22. (currently amended) Process as claimed in claim 16, characterized in that said ~~at least one~~ strain is added to the milk before pasteurization.

23. (previously presented) Process as claimed in claim 16, further comprising the step of preparing a milk derivative from the milk after said adding step.

24. (previously presented) Process as claimed in claim 23, wherein said milk derivative is cheese or yogurt.

25. (currently amended) A strain of lactic bacteria chosen from the group consisting of *L. plantarum* LMG- P- 21385, ~~*L. lactis* subsp. *lactis* LMG- P- 21387, *L. lactis* subsp. *lactis* LMG- P- 21388~~ and *L. plantarum* LMG-P-21389.

26. (previously presented) The strain of lactic bacteria of claim 25, in combination with one or more different strains of lactic bacteria chosen from the group consisting of *L. plantarum* LMG- P-21385, *L. lactis* subsp. *lactis* LMG-P-21387, *L. lactis* subsp. *lactis* LMG- P-21388 and *L. plantarum* LMG-P-21389.

27. (currently amended) The combination of claim 26, said combination of strains being ~~suited to improve or promote~~ effective to treat milk for milk coagulation.

28. (currently amended) Milk containing ~~one or more strains~~ a *Lactobacillus plantarum* strain of lactic bacteria chosen from the group consisting of ~~*L. plantarum* LMG- P- 21385, *L. lactis* subsp. *lactis* LMG- P- 21387, *L. lactis* subsp. *lactis* LMG- P- 21388 and *L. plantarum* LMG- P- 21389.~~

29. (currently amended) Milk ~~according to claim 28, said milk being obtained from a process comprising adding to the milk, before coagulation treatment, one or more strains of lactic bacteria chosen from the group consisting of *L. plantarum* LMG- P- 21385, *L. lactis* subsp. *lactis* LMG- P- 21387, *L. lactis* subsp. *lactis* LMG- P- 21388 and *L. plantarum* LMG- P- 21389~~ obtained from the process according to claim 16.

30. (previously presented) A dairy product derived from milk according to claim 29.

31. (new) The process of claim 16, wherein said *Lactobacillus plantarum* is LMG-P-21385 or LMG-P-21389 or a mixture thereof.